

TELEGRAM INFORMATION REPORT TELEGRAM

CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

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COUNTRY SOUTH VIETNAM

REPORT NO.

SUBJECT ASSESSMENT OF THE IMPACT OF THE BUDDHIST CRISIS ON THE PROVINCIAL POPULATION

DATE DISTR. 2 AUGUST 1963

PRECEDENCE ROUTINE

DATE OF INFO.

REFERENCES

IN 03233

PLACE & DATE ACQ. APPRAISAL

VIETNAM, SAIGON

FIELD REPORT NO.

THIS IS UNEVALUATED INFORMATION. SOURCE GRADINGS ARE DEFINITIVE. APPRAISAL OF CONTENT IS TENTATIVE.

SOURCE

1. SUMMARY AND APPRAISAL OF CONTENT: ALTHOUGH THE CONCLUSIONS HEREIN ARE BY NO MEANS DEFINITIVE, THIS IS PROBABLY A VALID ASSESSMENT OF THE SITUATION BASED ON THE INFORMATION AVAILABLE AT THIS TIME. IT SHOULD BE KEPT IN MIND THAT PEASANT ATTITUDES ON THIS AND OTHER ISSUES ARE DIFFICULT TO ASSESS AS INFORMATION IS GENERALLY REFRACTED THROUGH SOUTH VIETNAMESE SOURCES WITH VARIOUS AXES TO GRIND. ALTHOUGH WE BELIEVE THAT THE BUDDHIST ISSUE TO DATE HAS HAD ONLY A MOLEST IMPACT ON THE RURAL POPULATION IN SOUTH VIETNAM AND THAT THE PEASANTS HAVE NOT BEEN MARKEDLY AFFECTED, THE LONGER THE BUDDHIST/GOVERNMENT OF VIETNAM IMPASSE LASTS, THE MORE LIKELY IT IS THAT REPERCUSSIONS WILL RADIATE FROM URBAN AREAS, WHERE THE AFFAIR IS LARGELY CENTERED, INTO THE REMOINER RURAL AREAS. COMMENT. THIS REPORT WILL BE SUPPLEMENTED AS ADDITIONAL INFORMATION AND VIEWS BECOME AVAILABLE.)

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2. IN CENTRAL VIETNAM, THE UNREST AMONG THE PROVINCIAL POPULATION AS A RESULT OF THE BUDDHIST CRISIS IN AUGUST 1963 IS CENTERED IN COASTAL CITIES, AND THE BUDDHIST COMMUNICATION BREAKDOWN PREVENTS NEWS AND ORDERS FROM BEING SENT TO THE WESTERN PORTIONS OF THE PROVINCES. AS A RESULT, THE PEOPLE IN THE WESTERN PORTIONS ARE CONFUSED BY DISTORTED RUMORS OF INCIDENTS IN HUE, SAIGON, HOI AN, NHA TRANG, ETC., WHICH CONFLICT COMPLETELY WITH GOVERNMENT OF VIETNAM (GVN) RADIO REPORTS, PROVINCIAL STATEMENTS, AND PRESS COVERAGE OF THE SAME INCIDENTS. THE UNREST IS PROBABLY STRONGER IN CENTRAL VIETNAM AS A RESULT OF THE RECENT SUICIDES IN PHAN THIET, NHA TRANG AND HUE, AND THE RESULTANT GVN REACTION; BUT THE SERIOUSNESS OF THE SITUATION CANNOT BE JUDGED FROM JUST A FEW VISITS AND REPORTS. THE ARMY OF THE REPUBLIC OF VIETNAM (ARVN) EFFORT IN THE FIRST CORP AREA AGAINST THE VIETNAMESE COMMUNISTS (VC) HAS UNDOUBTEDLY BEEN CURTAILED AS MANY OF THE TROOPS ARE GARRISONED RATHER THAN DEPLOYED AGAINST THE VC AS USUAL, RESULTING IN A DEFINITELY LOWERED MORALE THAN PRIOR TO THE 8 MAY HUE INCIDENT. IT IS MORE DIFFICULT TO DETERMINE ANY CHANGE IN THE GENERAL POPULATION ATTITUDE; HOWEVER, A SMALL DEGREE OF UNREST DOES NOW PREVAIL THROUGHOUT THE PROVINCES OF NORTH CENTRAL VIETNAM. THIS PROBABLY POSES NO IMMEDIATE THREAT TO THE GVN, BUT IT WILL MAKE THE GVN'S TASK MORE DIFFICULT ON THE LONG RANGE BASIS AS IT HAS PROBABLY AFFECTED WHAT HAD BEEN AN ENCOURAGING TENDENCY, SMALL BUT PERCEPTIBLE, OF THE PEASANTRY TO RELY ON THE GVN AND MORE ACTIVELY TO OPPOSE THE VC. IT IS NOT UNREASONABLE TO ASSUME THAT MANY OF THESE PEOPLE WILL RETURN TO INDIFFERENCE TOWARDS THE VC.

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3. COMMENTS ON SPECIFIC PROVINCES AND CITIES FOLLOW:

A. DA NANG. ALTHOUGH UNDER MARTIAL LAW FOLLOWING THE INCIDENTS ON 18 AUGUST, MAYOR (LIEUTENANT COLONEL) TRAN NGOC CHAU HAS DEMONSTRATED CONSIDERABLE ADROITNESS IN HANDLING THE BUDDHIST PROBLEM. BARRING ANY MAJOR INCIDENT OR COLLOSSAL GVN BLUNDER IN HUE OR SAIGON (OF THE CHAIN REACTION TYPE), CHAU WILL PROBABLY CONTINUE TO MAINTAIN CONTROL OF THE SITUATION.

B. QUANG NAM PROVINCE. THE HOI AN INCIDENT OF 31 JULY HAS PLACED THIS PROVINCE IN THE WORST SITUATION SINCE 8 MAY. THIS IS LARGELY THE RESULT OF THE INEPTITUDE OF THE PROVINCE CHIEF WHO IS PROBABLY AN EXCEPTIONAL ARMY G-2 OFFICER AND IS HONEST AND MORALLY COURAGEOUS OFFICIAL, BUT IS NAIVE, INDECISIVE, AND UNSURE IN ADMINISTERING HIS PROVINCE. ALTHOUGH HE IS PROBABLY MORE ON GUARD AS A RESULT OF 31 JULY INCIDENT, HE CANNOT BE RELIED UPON TO PREVENT FUTURE OUTBREAKS FROM GETTING OUT OF HAND. THE SITUATION IS NOW RELATIVELY QUIET, BUT RESENTMENT IS STILL STRONG IN HOI AN AND IN THE IMMEDIATE ADJOINING VILLAGES.

C. QUANG TIN. THERE IS VERY LITTLE BUDDHIST ACTIVITY EVIDENT IN QUANG TIN, MAINLY BECAUSE THE PROVINCE HAS THE MOST SERIOUS SECURITY SITUATION OF ANY IN NORTH CENTRAL VIETNAM. THE VC HAVE JUST ABOUT PARALYZED VEHICLE TRAVEL WITHIN THE PROVINCE AND ARE OTHERWISE MAKING THEIR PRESENCE KNOWN THROUGHOUT THE PROVINCE. QUANG TIN IS ALSO BADLY HAMPERED BY EXTREMELY WEAK, AND QUITE OFTEN CORRUPT, OFFICIALS FROM THE PROVINCE CHIEF TO THE LOWEST LEVEL. THE ONLY BRIGHT SPOT IN THIS PROVINCE IS THAT FATHER HAO CONTINUES TO EXERT HIS INFLUENCE OVER THE COASTAL AREA AND HAS MADE A POINT OF NOT ALIENATING THE BUDDHISTS IN ANY

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WAY, THUS A BIG SOURCE OF FRICTION HAS BEEN REMOVED HERE.

D. QUANG NGAI. THE PROVINCE CHIEF HAS RULED WITH A STRONG AND RUTHLESS EFFICIENCY AND THEREBY PREVENTED ANY MAJOR UNREST. THERE IS PROBABLY WIDE RESENTMENT AGAINST HIS AUTHORITARIAN METHODS, BUT THIS IS NOT CONSIDERED ANY IMMEDIATE THREAT TO THE GVN.

E. KONTUM. THIS PROVINCE IS VERY SPARSELY SETTLED AND THUS APPARENTLY LITTLE INTEREST IN THE BUDDHIST MOVEMENT HAS BEEN EVIDENCED HERE. THE PROVINCE CHIEF STATED ON 5 AUGUST THAT IF TROUBLE DID START HE WOULD TAKE HIS CUE FROM THE QUANG NGAI PROVINCE CHIEF AND BAN ANY GATHERING OF OVER THREE PEOPLE. HE DOUBTED VERY SERIOUSLY IF SUCH A BAN WOULD BE NECESSARY AS THERE IS VERY LITTLE BUDDHIST AGITATION EVIDENT.

F. HUE. HUE IS THE MAIN TROUBLE SPOT AND PROBABLY WILL CONTINUE TO BE. PAST REPORTING ON HUE ADEQUATELY COVERS THIS CITY.

G. QUANG TRI. THIS IS ANOTHER PROVINCE WITH A STRONG CHIEF. IN JUNE, QUANG TRI CITY HAD SIGNIFICANT UNREST, BUT TIGHT CONTROLS HAVE STOPPED IT, AND HAVE PREVENTED ITS RECURRENCE.

H. THUA THIEN. LITTLE UNREST IS APPARENT IN THUA THIEN PROVINCE EXCEPT IN THOSE VILLAGES ON THE OUTSKIRTS OF HUE, WHOSE INHABITANTS HAVE BEEN GOING INTO HUE TO DEMONSTRATE.

I. NHA TRANG. THE BONZESS SUICIDE CAUSED A BRIEF FLAREUP IN NHA TRANG. ALTHOUGH CURFEW IS STILL IN FORCE, THE SITUATION IS RETURNING TO NORMAL ACCORDING A SECURITY SERVICE REPRESENTATIVE. THE POPULATION IS GENERALLY APATHETIC TO THE

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BUDDHIST ISSUE AND THEIR ROLE IN THE RECENT DEMONSTRATIONS WAS LARGELY THAT OF INTERESTED ONLOOKERS WITH NO NOTICEABLE APPEARANCE OF EMOTIONAL INVOLVEMENT. BECAUSE OF THE HEAVY AMERICAN EXPENDITURES IN THIS RESORT TOWN, THE LOCAL BUSINESSMEN ARE BELIEVED TO HAVE TOO MUCH AT STAKE IN A CONTINUED CALM THAN TO SUPPORT THE BUDDHISTS THROUGH SHOP CLOSINGS, ETC. ONE OF THE MAIN PROBLEMS IN NHA TRANG IS THE BANDS OF LATE TEEN-AGER "COWBOYS" WHO ENJOY HARASSING AND TAUNTING THE POLICE AND ARMY OF THE REPUBLIC OF VIETNAM (ARVN) SECURITY FORCES. GVN OFFICIALS IN NHA TRANG STATE THAT THE BUDDHIST LEADERSHIP IS WORKING HARD TO GENERATE VILLAGE-LEVEL SUPPORT IN THE RURAL AREAS OF THE PROVINCE, BUT THE OFFICIALS CLAIM THAT THEIR EFFORTS ARE BEARING LITTLE FRUIT. THE OFFICIALS INSIST THAT THIS IS STILL ALSO THE CASE IN OTHER PROVINCES IN THE SOUTH CENTRAL COASTAL AREA.

4. IN THE SOUTHEASTERN PROVINCES TO THE NORTH OF SAIGON, THERE HAS BEEN LITTLE PUBLIC MANIFESTATION OF SENTIMENT ABOUT THE BUDDHIST ISSUE, EITHER IN THE TOWNS OR IN RURAL AREAS. A REGIONAL SECURITY SERVICE OFFICIAL CLAIMS THAT HE AND HIS SECURITY SERVICE COLLEAGUES HAVE THE SITUATION WELL UNDER CONTROL, ARE IN DISCREET CONTACT WITH THE LOCAL BUDDHIST LEADERSHIP, AND DO NOT EXPECT ANY SERIOUS TROUBLE TO DEVELOP IN THEIR REGION.

5. IN THE DELTA AREA, THERE HAS LIKEWISE BEEN LITTLE OUTWARD EXPRESSION OF POPULAR SENTIMENT ON THE BUDDHIST ISSUE, WHICH IS TO BE EXPECTED IN VIEW OF THE FACT THAT BUDDHISM HAS NEVER BEEN AS ORGANIZATIONALLY STRONG OR AS DEEPLY FELT BY

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THE POPULAE AS IN CENTRAL VIETNAM.

6. [REDACTED] DISSEM. STATE CINCPAC ARPAC PACAF PACFLT.

END OF MESSAGE

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